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ENGLISH ELECTIONS AND HOME RULE.

BY HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF ARGYLL.

IN WRITING for American readers mainly I feel as if I were addressing friends. Some of the most intimate friends I have ever had in life have been Americans, and these include not a few of the greatest names in American literature and politics during the last forty years.

I took an early part in trying to set right the misguided current of feeling which at first set strongly in England against the American Union in the great Civil War. Both on the ground that slavery was the institution really fought for by the South, and also on the ground of the right of the American Union to fight for its single nationality, I felt that the "North" was in the right, and that the cause of civilization was at stake in the success of the Union.

My feeling and opinion on the Irish question of Home Rule is founded on the same convictions. Irish Home Rule is—in one well-known word—"Secesh." The profession to keep unity under a common crown is insincere with all the Irish leaders, and it is inspired by ignorance among the few who are sincere in it.

Under the united constitution the crown has no power except through a parliamentary majority and an executive cabinet dependent thereupon. A united nationality cannot be maintained with one crown unsupported by one supreme parliament.

The Gladstonian proposal is to set up in Ireland a separate parliament with a separate executive government, through which alone the powers of the crown could be exerted, except on a few enumerated subjects. Even supposing that those excepted powers could be maintained against the constant inevitable pressure to break down the walls of the limitation, they would be useless to defend the individual subjects, or citizens, of the Irish people from legislative attacks upon life, liberty, and property.

Even in the case of our large colonies the veto power of the crown over the legislation of the colonial parliaments is practically *nil*. It may delay, it may compel, reconsideration, but anything more than this would be resented, and a real veto could only be enforced at the cost of separation. The pretext that the new Irish Parliament would be only "statutory" is transparent sophistry. The abstract right of an originally imperial parliament to repeal all or any of its own enactments is a purely theoretical and visionary right. It would be practically impotent to repeal any of the acts conferring responsible government on our larger colonies. The same abstract doctrine was the doctrine on which the taxation of the New England colonies was defended by the ministers of George III., and it is even now impossible to say that their egregious folly in that policy was, in the strict sense of that word, illegal.

This pretext, therefore, is futile. In the act of creating a new parliament for Ireland we shall undoubtedly divest ourselves of all power to take back what we have once given, except, of course, at the cost of civil war, and to this alternative we should be unquestionably driven if the anticipations are fulfilled, in which I fully share. Sooner or later, such antagonisms would be developed that Great Britain would be compelled to restore and assert her national unity, and her imperial authority, by force. And this remedy was actually contemplated by some of the Gladstonian leaders when they defended the proposal of 1886. Sir William Harcourt, in his speech on that bill, frankly owned that he could not say he was confident as to the use to which the Irish leaders would put their newly acquired powers. But he pointed out, that if the worst came to the worst, we should have more than thirty millions against less than five millions, to secure a remedy. This was a threat of the use of force very thinly disguised.

Americans, therefore, may depend upon it that we feel that

we are fighting the same battle they fought against "Secession," and against the breaking up of our national unity.

But then there is more than this behind. Our colonists carry with them all the principles and doctrines of the common law of England respecting all the rights and mutual obligations of men to each other in society. It was the same with the older colonies now constituting the American Union. The colonists were not anarchists. They kept that rich inheritance of law which was their own inheritance as much as it is our inheritance at home. Accordingly when the Union was formed, each of the colonies kept this inheritance, and guarded it by a few general clauses in the constitution; few and general as these clauses were they were enough for the purpose then—because there was no party existing which called in question the fundamental principles of all civilized society. But when the great slavery rebellion was suppressed the need was felt of strengthening the clauses by more significant additions; and now under the shield of your constitution every citizen of your Union is guaranteed against the loss of life, liberty and property, by any anarchical legislation of individual States.

It may well seem incredible to Americans when I tell them that in the Gladstonian scheme of Home Rule for Ireland no such security was given for the freedom of the individual citizen, as is thus provided in your constitution. All property and all liberty was left absolutely at the mercy of the Irish Parliament. So monstrous a proposition had never been made before by any statesman.

It is not therefore the fear of religious persecution in any direct form that has given voice to the indignation of Ulster. They fear the loss of all that makes life tolerable to free and civilized men. The majority in the new Irish Parliament are sure to be men who have avowed principles and desires which are fatal to all industrial progress or to the secure enjoyment of any property. I regard the voice of Ulster, which represents the greatest industrial centre in the whole island, as the voice also of the minority over the whole of the rest of Ireland. They dread the loss of all those securities for individual liberty and for property which is accorded under the American Constitution to all its citizens in all the States.

I understand that in the United States the charter of the old

English sovereigns which were given in the (ten) colonies are the recognized title deeds of much property all over the country. It may have passed from hand to hand many times ; but the original title has been the fountain and the source of all security. Americans have thus secured for themselves a perfect continuity in the enjoyment of all the liberties and securities on which society reposes in England. All their later legislation has gone upon similar lines, and spoliation has been impossible. Compare this with the prospects in Ireland. Many of the Irish nationalist leaders are pure anarchists on all questions connected with property: and some of them have avowed their intention to treat as waste paper all titles to property coming from English sovereigns or parliaments. The Gladstonian scheme of Home Rule made no provision against such a danger as this. There was no grand declaration such as you have in your constitution, in favor of the sacredness of contracts, or of the sacredness of property in all its forms.

The assertion, therefore, that in their determined resistance to such a fearful revolution the people of Ulster are merely seeking to maintain an old religious "ascendancy" over their Catholic fellow citizens, is an assertion which can only be described as an infamous falsehood. I do not myself fear any direct form of religious persecution. The day for that is gone by ; but in many parts of Ireland powers of plunder would undoubtedly be given to local bodies in which priests would reign supreme over an ignorant, superstitious, and dependent population of peasants, and of anarchical fanatics who may be of any religion or of none.

Let the American people clearly understand that Mr. Gladstone proposed to invest the Irish Parliament with power far more extensive than that which your constitution gives to any State, although, as regards those States, there never has been, nor is there now, any serious danger of such powers being abused as they certainly would be in Ireland.

Let me warn Americans of another thing to be kept in mind. They must not trust the accuracy of Mr. Gladstone's assertions about the past history of Ireland. All his utterances have been, at the least, one-sided and partisan in character. Very often they have been in absolute defiance of the facts. For example, he has lately represented his scheme as one which merely proposed to restore to Ireland some limited share of the power of self-government

which she had once enjoyed, and of which she was deprived at the Union. The fact is that Ireland never has had a Parliament with one-tenth of the enormous power he would have given under his scheme of 1886. During all the middle ages Ireland had no parliament at all, in the modern sense of the word. The body which had the name was not a parliament representing all Ireland, but merely a local council representing a small area round Dublin called "The Pale," which was an area mainly peopled by the Norman and Anglo-Saxon "Colonists." It never did represent the great mass of the Celtic people. Since the Reformation what professed to be the Irish Parliament was representative, practically, of the Protestants only; and when, in a moment of imperial weakness, Grattan wrung from England a parliament nominally independent, that parliament retained its exclusive character of a purely Protestant assembly. And even in this character its "independence" was a farce, because it had no executive, and every bill it passed, which was disapproved of by the Imperial Government, was instantly disallowed. In affairs which may be called municipal they had some power, and very badly they used it. Much of the legislation they adopted was "protectionist" to a degree which no party in the United States would promote. Bounties on corn led to the breaking up of the most valuable pastures, and to this day the exhausting effects of their foolish legislation tells upon the agricultural industry of Ireland.

I mention Mr. Gladstone's misrepresentations on the subject of Irish history merely to give a specimen of what I mean. The same tone of inflated fable about Irish history colors every speech he makes, and if it were possible to say that it represents even an approximation to the truth, it would leave us in bewilderment how he never discovered all this till he was past 75 years of age, and how he, even up to that age, denounced those Irishmen who held similar language as the excuse for their violent and revolutionary remedies. It is in vain to go back to Irish history to establish any real connection between the long miseries of the country and the English invasion, or the later English colonizations. Montalembert, the noblest representative of the French Catholic laity in our time, has recorded in his beautiful book on the "Monks of the West" the impression made upon him by his readings in Irish history. The early Celtic Church took a noble part in the missionary work of Western Christianity. But for

that golden age of Irish history we must go back some 1,300 years. Even then the Celtic Church had incurable vices of constitution. It was as "tribal" as the Celtic clans. It joined and stimulated all their barbarous intertribal wars. The monastic bodies fought with each other, and slaughtered each other, and wasted each other's lands continually. No civilized law existed in the country, except the law of England, in the small area of the Pale. The murderous conflicts which were continuous for many centuries desolated the country and decimated the population. It is the grossest of all historical delusions that the miseries of Ireland have been due to external causes. They were due to the utter absence of civilizing institutions; and that again was due to the fact that Ireland was never conquered as England was conquered. No race superior in organization ever made itself complete master of the country. In England we are now all proud of "the Conquest." It was a great step in our progress. The poorer Irish longed to be admitted to the benefits of English law. But the Celtic chiefs and the half-Celticized Norman lords preferred their own tribal usages, because these gave them more complete power over the people.

The most striking calamity which has ever happened to any modern people was the Irish famine of 1846-7. In one sense of the word, it was the fault of nobody. That is to say, it was due to causes the result of which no man foresaw. Nevertheless, those causes were exclusively connected with habits peculiarly Irish. I mean the habit of contentment with a very low standard of life, of occupying and cultivating the ground in small patches continually more and more subdivided, and producing chiefly, almost only, a crop which turned out to be singularly precarious. Nobody foresaw that precariousness. But the precariousness of the potato did not starve thousands in England or in Scotland, because the Irish habits of occupation had long been superseded by more civilized methods of holding and cultivating land. The enormous multiplication of the population of Ireland between 1798 and 1846, an increase from four and a half millions to above eight millions, did not show any political misgovernment. Men do not thus multiply under bad government. What it did show was bad economic conditions, and these can be traced with certainty and precision to the survival in Ireland of semi-barbarous habits, which were peculiarly Irish. Yet the great calamity of

the Irish famine is continually charged by the Irish orators upon the English government, with which it had nothing whatever to do.

What Ireland wants now is peace and the reign of law. All grievances have been removed. Such was the emphatic declaration of Mr. Gladstone himself in 1885. Nothing has happened to justify his retreat from this great confession. Parliamentary convenience, and nothing else, has led to his passionate retractions, and his appeals to ignorance in support of his new schemes.

I have written this, *currente calamo*. But I wish my American friends to understand that it is on principles well understood among them, and which they consider dear in their own constitution, that so many here are determined to resist and oppose to the uttermost the anarchical attempt to disintegrate the United Kingdom—just as they resisted the attempt to break up the United Republic in the interests of slavery and secession.

ARGYLL.